

ART. IX.—*A Bronze Fragment of Late-Keltic Engraving.*  
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ANYTHING that throws light on the Early British period must always be a welcome addition to our knowledge; and the bronze fragment here illustrated (Fig. 1) not only suggests a likely date for the site on

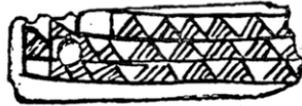


FIG. 1.—BRONZE FRAGMENT FROM URSWICK STONE WALLS;  
REAL SIZE.

which it was discovered last Easter, but seems to furnish a link in the evolution of Late-Keltic ornament. It lay close to the large hut-circle in the middle of Urswick Stone Walls, and was the only ornamented object discovered at the time. Though several explorations of such hut-circles have been made in Wales and elsewhere, there is still some doubt as to their exact date and origin; and the large number still existing in the country offer an interesting field for inquiry.

The present note is, however, confined to the style of ornament, and it is hoped that the accompanying illustrations will make clear what would be difficult to convey in words. The derivation of Late-Keltic art from the classical designs of southern and central Europe has been demonstrated by Dr. Arthur Evans,\* and the motive that

\* *Archæologia*, lii., 364.

appears on the Urswick fragment is not distinctively Late-Keltic. In the remarks that follow it must be understood that even the relative (as distinct from the absolute) chronology of Early British remains is not by any means certain, and that fresh discoveries may modify the conclusions already arrived at; but several stages of development seem to be exemplified by extant specimens, and the Urswick fragment may be classed as early in the series.

It will be noticed that the little strip of thin bronze, which is pierced for a rivet at one end, is engraved with bands of "hatched" triangles, the filling consisting of lines parallel to one of the sides, not horizontal or vertical. This pattern is familiar on pottery and finely engraved products of the Bronze Age in this country and abroad, especially on gold specimens, such as the Irish crescents or "lunulae," the Brahalish armband and Cintra collar, as well as the bronze sun-disc from Ireland;\* but the thinness of the Urswick fragment and its somewhat uncouth engraving both point to a somewhat late date. Whether this design survived into the Late-Keltic period (as is very likely), or was directly borrowed from classical sources, cannot be determined at present, but it certainly occurs on Italian bronzes such as the *cista* from Offida, Picenum, that well represents the prototype of the famous Aylesford bucket,† the former dating from the fourth, and the latter from the first century, B.C.

In the British Museum are two bronze dagger-sheaths‡ engraved with bands of filled triangles as well executed as in the Bronze Age, but the sheaths clearly belong to the Iron Age types derived from the civilisation of La Tène. They both come from the Thames valley and one has

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\* Reference is made to figs. 137, 138, 142, and 146 of the *Guide to Bronze Age Antiquities in the British Museum*; and elsewhere to the companion volume, *Guide to Iron Age Antiquities*.

† Both are illustrated in the *Iron Age Guide*, figs. 24, 93; see pp. 29, 115.

‡ *Iron Age Guide*, fig. 74, from the Thames at Wandsworth; the other is from Richmond.

sloping lines, the other dots in the triangles, the latter filling being also seen on a collar from Trenoweth, Cornwall.\* Other specimens may be quoted to show the continued use and probable development of the motive; and attention may first be called to a fragmentary bronze casting (Fig. 2.) from Ashdown, Berks., that shows a

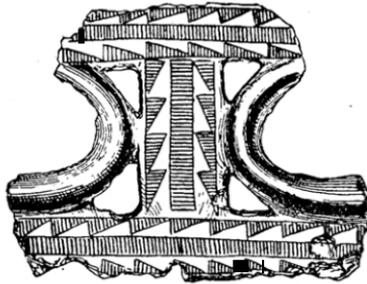


FIG. 2.—BRONZE MOUNT, PIERCED AND ENGRAVED;  
ASHDOWN BERKS (*British Museum*),  $\frac{2}{3}$  SIZE.

clumsy adaptation of the hatched triangle. It is pierced in four places and has loops at the back, with horn-like limbs in relief on either side, evidently used for the same purpose as another piece in the same collection from the well-known Polden Hill hoard (Fig. 3.). Bands

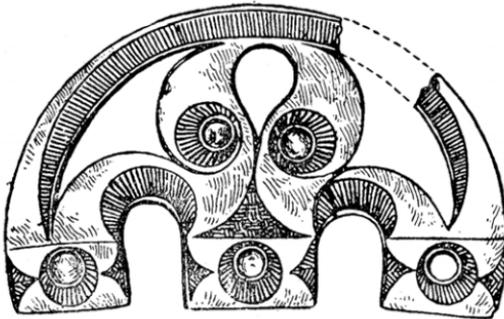


FIG. 3.—PIERCED BRONZE MOUNT, ENGRAVED AND ENAMELLED,  
POLDEN HILL, SOM. (*British Museum*),  $\frac{2}{3}$  SIZE.

engraved with transverse lines occur on both, but while the Ashdown fragment has a primitive appearance, the

\* *Archæologia*, xvi., 137.

other evidently belongs to the best period of Late-Keltic art, and retains traces of red enamel settings. An approximate date for the Polden Hill bronzes is afforded by the brooches\* included in the hoard, and on this piece of first century work we detect the "basket" pattern that is so closely associated with the bronze mirrors of the period. It is suggested that the Keltic artist, who knew the value of empty spaces, used when necessary groups of parallel lines like those of the hatched triangle, as a filling or background. If this view is correct, the Polden Hill bronze represents a stage between the angular decoration of the Urswick or Ashdown fragments and the handsome designs of the mirror-backs, as Fig. 4. Just as

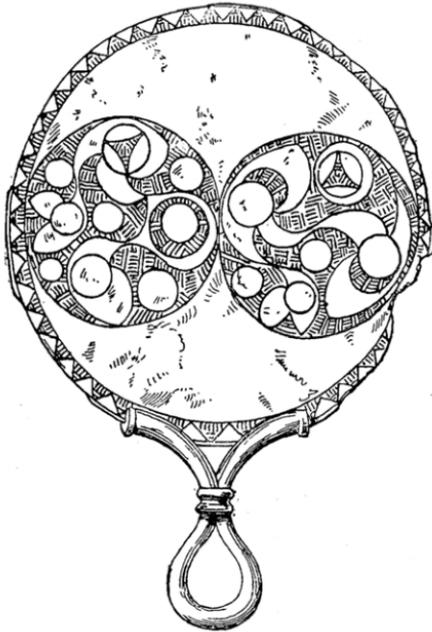


FIG. 4. †—ENGRAVED BRONZE MIRROR-BACK,  
TRELAN BAHOW, CORNWALL (*British Museum*),  $\frac{1}{3}$  SIZE.

\* *Iron Age Guide*, fig. 109.

† By permission from the *Iron Age Guide*.

the early Irish illuminated MSS. show angular motives mingled with the more purely Keltic eccentric curves, so in the art of the mirrors it is permissible to distinguish the peculiar Late-Keltic scroll-work from the angular patterns of earlier date or alien origin.

The border of the Trelan Bahow mirror will be seen to consist of a band of filled triangles, the hatching being both horizontal and vertical. A horizontal filling occurs, in association with the more usual sloping lines, on the Bronze Age gold collar\* from Llanllyfni, Carnarvonshire, and the direction was evidently optional. When a larger or irregular space had to be filled the short lines were engraved in groups at various angles (centre of Fig. 3), the result being somewhat like basket-work, in which the ancient Britons are known to have been expert. Perhaps the earliest hint of this pattern is on the boss of the Grimthorpe shield† in the British Museum, and it should be remembered that coral was found in the grave, as on the Witham shield, which probably dates from the second century, B.C. The sword found in the same grave is typologically somewhat earlier than that from Bugthorpe,‡ where discs covered with studs of red enamel imitating coral were also found; and the later sword bears engraving closely allied to that of the mirrors which can be approximately dated. From the associated objects both the Birdlip§ and Mount Batten|| specimens may be attributed to the first century A.D., perhaps to the first half of it; and though we cannot say that the bronze to which the Urswick fragment belonged had no Keltic scroll-work on it, it seems safest to assign it to the first or even the second century before our era.

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\* *Bronze Age Guide*, fig. 137.

† *Archæologia*, xliii., pp. 475, 483; Jewitt's *Reliquary*, ix., 180, where it is erroneously called Anglo-Saxon.

‡ *Iron Age Guide*, fig. 86.

§ *Transactions*, Bristol and Gloucs. Arch. Soc., 1880-1, vol. v., pl. xiii., p. 138.  
 || *Archæologia*, xl., plates xxx. (mirror) and xxxi. (brooches), p. 502.